



HARALD JOHNSON

SWIMMING WITH THE TIDE

*Those who despise
pools find comfort in
the San Francisco Bay.*

by Brian Clark

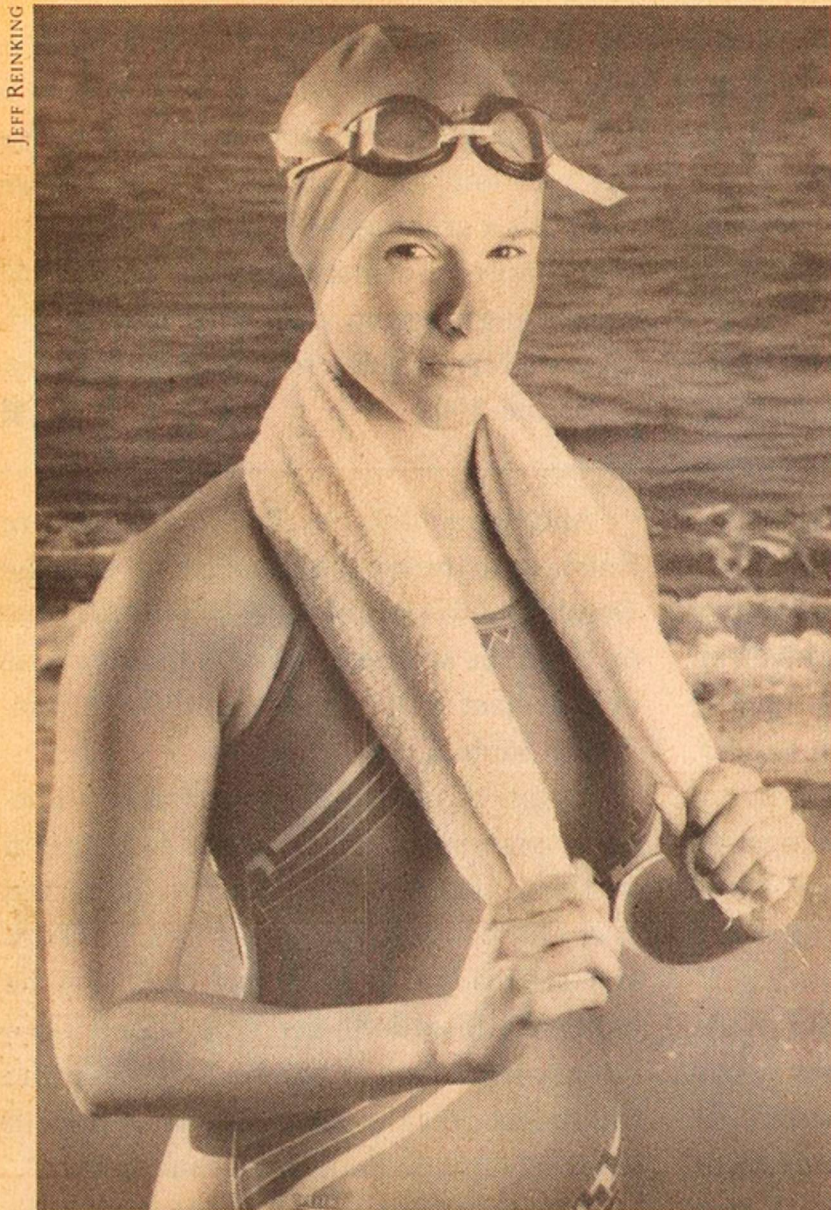
IF YOU'VE HAD IT WITH CHLORINE, CROWDED lanes, getting run over by hot shots, and you're tired of having to be careful not to crash into a wall every 25 yards, bay swimming may be just what the sports doctor ordered for you.

You'll have to be tough enough to put up with chilly water, and an occasional boat or piece of flotsam may bar your way. But swimmers who have been stroking it up in the bay for decades, as well as recent converts, claim it is the greatest thing since goggles. Some of them say the only way you'd get them into a chlorinated pool is to throw them in.

Bay swimming, along with its fresh-water cousin, open-water lake and reservoir swimming, is gaining steadily in popularity —

perhaps in part because of the rise in interest in triathlons. The first year the Lake Berryessa 2-mile swim was held a few years back, it drew 200 people. This year, the event, which is sponsored by the Davis Aquatic Masters swimming club, drew more than 1,000 participants.

To swim in the bay, all you need is courage, thick skin, a bathing cap or two and a suit, according to Suzanne Heim, a Marin County special education teacher who is one of the best open-water swimmers in the world. "But you can't emphasize enough that a person should be a strong swimmer. I'd hate to have it come across that it's a piece of cake and then have somebody go out there and drown," says Heim, who is training for a swim across the English Channel in mid August. Heim



Suzanne Heim, who puts in more miles in the San Francisco Bay than anyone else, is fond of swimming in arctic conditions; she'll attempt the English Channel this summer.

knows all too well about novices who try to swim in the bay. She recently had to rescue a somewhat inebriated woman swimmer who had hopped in Aquatic Bay only to be swept toward the Golden Gate.

Heim believes the best place to swim in the bay is at Aquatic Cove, near Fisherman's Wharf. There is usually a lifeguard on duty and the swimming area is marked by buoys. In addition, there are free public changing rooms at the cove. The Dolphin Swim and Boat Club is also in the cove, but use of the facilities, which include a sauna, costs \$5 a visit.

Heim advises swimmers to stay within the buoys, where boats are supposed to steer clear. Although she often ventures beyond the curved Muni Pier, she says the tides and currents can get much more tricky outside the barrier. Early mornings between 8 and 10 a.m. are the best times to workout, according to Heim, who has swum the Golden Gate countless times. "That's when it is calmest. I'm told that every hour after 9 a.m. the wind picks up 5 miles an hour. And it's when you have rough water that things can become harder.

"I love it, and I certainly prefer it to pool swimming," she continues. "You have to know what you are doing, though. Because when you are way out there and the going gets rough or something happens, there is no side of the pool to swim to.

"But there is something very special and therapeutic about it. I guess that's why some of those great old guys have been doing it for more than 20, 30 and 40 years. Some of those old-timers haven't missed a day in years and years. I think it keeps them young," she says of the veterans at the Dolphin and South End clubs at Aquatic Park. Compared to them, Heim's seven years in the bay qualify her as a piker, although her feats are unsurpassed.

WALTER STACK, 77, IS ONE OF HEIM'S "great old guys," though he too is a relative newcomer to bay swimming with only 20 years of experience under his trunks. "I'm no great swimmer, really I'm just a turkey out there in the water. But I like to do it because it's very relaxing and refreshing. It cools me off after I finish my run," says the hearty and

hale Stack, who jogs almost daily on a 17-mile circuit from San Francisco to Sausalito and back. He's swum to Alcatraz many times and done countless other bay swims. He says his love for the water might have something to do with the 26 years he spent at sea.

Stack also worked as a hod carrier in the building trades for many years, and came to know most of the public pools in San Francisco. It was in 1965 that he first swam Alcatraz, and he's been hooked on bay swimming ever since.

He wears two regulation orange swimming caps to keep his body warm—most of the heat escapes through the head—and he wears a regular swimming suit. And while he is aware of the tides, he says swimming in Aquatic Cove is safe and hassle free. Sometimes when the tide is coming in strong, it might take me 1,000 strokes or more to get to the pier instead of my usual 600 or so because of the power of the tide. But then I get pushed coming back. And as for jellyfish or sharks, well, I've never seen any in the bay, except for the little ones like sand sharks. For my money, it's a great place to swim."

Heim has never encountered a shark in her bay swims either, though she is "acutely aware" of them when she swims the Bay to Breakers route, or is stroking across the Golden Gate.

But it is the tides under the gate — which can create swirls, whirlpools and the equivalent of Class II river white water — that have given her the willies. "But I like the changes in the water. And I like the challenges. It's invigorating for me, too," she says.

"If you're interested in leaning more about swimming in the bay, contacting Ron Chism or one of the other lifeguards of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area staff would be a good idea. Chism, who has been a lifeguard at Aquatic Park for seven years, says the National Park Service encourages swimming in the cove and offers a program called Learn to Swim in the Bay.

"We teach them about what they should do to adapt their bodies to the water and tell them about hypothermia and how long they can stay in the water," he explains. "And we cover other things like the importance of wearing a brightly colored bathing cap—both

From the S.F. Marathon to the Coors Classic Fleet Feet's got you covered!



Introducing our new line of cycling shorts and tops by **Hind** and **Scott Tinley**. State of the Art Lycra/polypropylene multi-colored shorts with matching singlets and jerseys.



We're more than just a running store

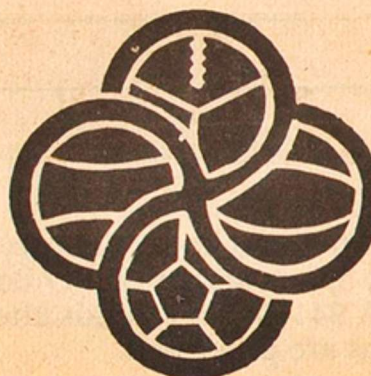
2086 Chestnut St., San Francisco ■ 921-7188
(Visit our other 14 locations)

For sports injuries you need a sports medicine physician.

See us at the Institute for Sports Medicine. Get help from the medical team who cares about your injuries —and your sport.

We offer complete medical care for the recreational and team athlete.

- Staffed by multi-specialty sports medicine physicians
- Cybex testing and training
- Individualized exercise and re-conditioning programs
- Weight training equipment and pool therapy
- Evaluation, treatment and therapy services are covered by most insurance companies.



INSTITUTE FOR SPORTS MEDICINE

Ralph K. Davies Medical Center
Castro and Duboce, San Francisco
CA 94114 (415) 565-6199